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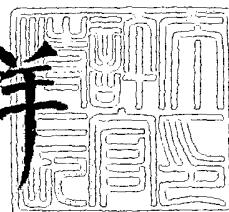
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1. A system for providing service in a wireless local area network comprising

i. a single or plurality of wireless access points (WAP) capable of processing a subset of complete functionality defined for the wireless local area network;

ii. a single or plurality of control nodes (CN) capable of providing a subset or complete functionalities defined for the wireless local area network; and

iii. means for the wireless access point to dynamically negotiate with the control node for a secure connections and function split arrangement; whereby the control node would provide the complementary functionality for the wireless access point to form a complete functionality defined for the wireless local area network.

2. The system according to claim 1 wherein the said wireless access point and control nodes further comprise logically independent functional components of the functionalities defined for the wireless local area network with predefined interface used between each functional components.

3. The system according to claim 2 wherein interfaces between said functional components could be used over remote connections between the said wireless access point and control node.

4. The system according to claim 1 wherein each said control node further comprises a control node controller module and each said wireless access point further comprises a wireless access point controller module.

5. The system according to claim 4 wherein the controller module of control node further comprises a single or plurality of processing schedule composed of sequential lists of descriptors for subsets of functional components used for each wireless access point.

6. The system according to claim 4 wherein the controller module of wireless access point further comprises a single or plurality of processing schedule composed of sequential lists of descriptors for subsets of functional components used for each associated mobile terminal.

7. The system according to claim 1, wherein the wireless access point further comprises:

i. means for discovering the available control node within a specified domain; and

ii. means for negotiating secure connection with control node that could offer the desired functions;

whereby the wireless access point is able to locate the control node that provides necessary complementary functionalities to it with regard to the defined complete wireless local area network functions.

8. The system according to claim 1, wherein the controller module of said control node is capable of generating data unit to resemble that from a mob

ile terminal.

9. A system for load balancing in a wireless local area network (WLAN) without requiring association handover at the mobile terminal comprising:

i. a single or plurality of mobile terminals, each said mobile terminal associated with and receiving services from a single or plurality of wireless access point (WAP);

ii. a single or plurality of said wireless access point that are capable of processing data units received from the mobile terminal or other wireless access point using a subset of its defined WLAN functions; and

iii. a means for the wireless access points to exchange data units processed with a subset or complete defined WLAN functions;

whereby a data unit for a mobile terminal is processed with complete WLAN functions by a plurality of WAP where each WAP processing it with only a subset of the complete WLAN functions.

10. The system according to claim 9 wherein the wireless access point further comprises a control module that is capable of negotiating with other wireless access points of the subset of the complete WLAN functions to be carried out at each wireless access point.

11. The system according to claim 9 wherein the wireless access point further comprising a local database that stores all the association of the mobile terminals attached to it and corresponding subset of the complete WLAN functions to be provided to the mobile terminal.

12. The system according to claim 1, wherein the functionalities of the said WAP and CN collocate in a single network element.

13. A method for providing service in a wireless local area network (WLAN) that allows defined WLAN function split between wireless access point (WAP) and a single or plurality of Control Node (CN) comprising the steps of:

i. containing information about its own subset of the WLAN functions to all the CN by a WAP discover the CN that could provide complementary WLAN functions by sending message;

ii. replying with a message containing information about the subset of the WLAN functions it could offer to the WAP by the CN after received the said discover message; and

iii. choosing from all the replied CNs a proper CN based on local policy and establishing association with it by the said WAP.

14. The method for the WAP to decide which CN to use according to claim 13 using information, the information comprising:

- i. the subset of the WLAN functions offered by the CN;
- ii. a cost of using the CN;
- iii. a vendor of the CN;
- iv. a characteristics of the connection to the CN; and
- v. a weighted sum of the above factors.

15. A method for providing service in a wireless local area network (WLAN)

LAN) that allows defined WLAN function split between wireless access point (WAP) and a single or plurality of Control Node (CN) comprising the steps of:

i. dynamically discovering by the CN the capability of a WAP by sending a message to a WAP containing a section that emulates the data unit sends by a mobile terminal;

ii. processing the said section using the same procedure for processing data units from a mobile terminal and sending it back to the said CN in a reply message by the mobile terminal received the said message; and

iii. obtaining the capability information of the said WAP by examining the processed data units in the said reply message by the said CN.

16. A method for providing service in a wireless local area network (WLAN) that allows defined WLAN function split between wireless access point (WAP) and a single or plurality of Control Node (CN) comprising the steps of:

i. obtaining capability of the WAP by the CN; and

ii. negotiating with another or a plurality of CNs for the supplementary WLAN functions to be provided to the WAP by the said CN.

17. A method for carrying out load balancing in a wireless local area network (WLAN) without requiring a mobile terminal to change association relationship with wireless access point (WAP) comprising the steps of:

i. separating the processing function provided to the mobile terminal into association specific and non-association specific by the WAP;

ii. negotiating with another WAP of the non-association specific processing functions and establishing a secure tunnel with it by the said WAP;

iii. tunneling by the said WAP the data unit from a mobile terminal to the said other WAP through the tunnel after processing it with the association specific function; and

iv. receiving the processed data unit through the said tunnel and processing it with non-association specific functions by the said other WAP.

18. The method according to claim 17 further comprising the steps of:
using the wireless channel to establish direct connection with another WAP and setting up secure tunnel over the direct connection by the said WAP

19. The method according to claim 17 further comprising the step of deciding by the WAP on whether to tunnel data unit from the mobile terminal to another WAP for non association specific processing by monitoring the load at WAP and comparing it with a preset threshold value.

20. The method according to claim 17 further comprising the step of deciding by the said WAP on which other WAPs should be used for non association specific processing by monitoring the load at different WAPs it has connection with and comparing it with a preset threshold value.

21. The method according to claim 17 further comprising the step of monitoring by a central control entity the load status on all the WAPs within a certain domain and mandating the distribution of non-association processing function between different WAPs.

22. The method according to claim 17 for the WAP to determine the distribution of non-association specific function based on information, the information comprising:

- i. a size of the data unit to be processed;
- ii. an expected average time for the processing of the data unit;
- iii. an overhead time for processing the data unit; and
- iv. a weighted sum of above factors.

23. A method for providing service in a wireless local area network (WLAN) that allows defined WLAN function split between wireless access point (WAP) and a single or plurality of Control Node (CN) comprising the steps of:
i. processing the total of its subset of functionality defined for the WLAN by a subset of WAPs; and
ii. providing distinct subsets of complementary functionality defined for the WLAN to each of the subset of WAPs by the CN.

24. A method for providing service in a wireless local area network (WLAN) that allows defined WLAN function split between wireless access point (WAP) and a single or plurality of Control Node (CN) comprising the steps of:
i. determining a common subset of functionality required for the WLAN available at a subset of the WAPs by the CN;
ii. processing the said determined common subset of functionality by each WAP of the subset; and
iii. providing similar subsets of complementary functionality to each of the subset of WAPs by the CN.

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Title of the Invention
System and method for negotiations for WLAN entities

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Wireless local area networks (WLANs) have invoked great interests from both consumers and the industry. These networks offer increased flexibility and higher productivity gains that appeal to numerous users. Such wide-spread interest has translated into rapidly growing demand for large-scale deployments of WLAN infrastructure.

As WLANs grow in size, they incorporate increasing numbers of wireless access points (WAPs), each providing services to increasing numbers of associated mobile terminals (MTs). Given the number of WAPs required for large-scale WLAN deployments, the task of managing them becomes complex and tedious.

In response to this concern, many equipment manufacturers have introduced wireless switches or other similar devices that aim to simplify the processes of deploying and managing large WLANs. This is achieved by aggregating control of a number of WAPs at a single controller entity, which is the wireless switch, also referred to as the controlling node (CN). CNs are additionally designed to consolidate some WLAN functionality which were previously implemented in legacy WAPs and leave only the remaining functionality to those new WAPs that are compliant with a particular CN and therefore compliant with a particular type of functionality division.

This concept of division of WLAN functionality between WAPs and CNs has been endorsed by various equipment manufacturers. However since WLAN standards, like the popular IEEE 802.11, do not mandate how functionality is to be partitioned among various entities, these divisions vary among different firms. So, different manufacturers incorporate different types of functionality divisions in their products. Consequently, incompatibilities arise between WAPs and CNs from diverse manufacturers. These differences have intensified the challenge of managing large WLANs comprising entities from different manufacturers, each incorporating different degrees of functional capabilities. As such, this ultimately affects the end customer market.

Given such a scenario, it is pertinent that WLAN entities be capable of interoperation with other WLAN entities in spite of the differences in the functionality that they incorporate. Furthermore, entities adhering to different types of functionality divisions should be able to jointly operate within a single WLAN environment. This would provide greater flexibility in deploying and managing WAPs from different manufacturers with different degrees of functionality. Another advantage is the possibility of integrating entities that conform to some type of functional division with the majority of existing entities that do not conform to any specific division, thereby increasing the operability of these WAPs.

The differences between WLAN entities based on their functionality capabilities refer to static differences as these are design aspects and are present throughout their operations. So the means of accommodating static differences between va

rious WLAN entities has many advantages as mentioned.

A further benefit involves recognizing and accommodating dynamic differences between WLAN entities. This allows various entities to provide active assistance, like that of load-balancing, to other entities. For instance, during the functioning of a WLAN, the processing load at a WAP can become substantially high even exceeding the processing capacity of the WAP. This could be due to increases in the number of associated MTs or due to increases in the volume of traffic from the associated MTs. These differences in processing load over time constitute a dynamic factor as they are dependent on the dynamics of the MTs.

The dynamism of such situations need not prevail at other WAPs of the WLAN at the same time. Therefore, the processing load at other WAPs may not be as considerable. These differences in processing load across the WAPs comprising a WLAN have traditionally been addressed by affecting handovers of MTs from their associated WAPs where processing load is high, to re-associate the MTs with other WAPs where processing load is relatively low.

"Method and apparatus for facilitating handoff in a wireless local area network", US 2003/0035464 A1, discloses a means for addressing dynamic differences in the levels of processing load at WAPs. In this method, WAPs proactively interact with each other in order to determine those WAPs which are agreeable to take over some MT associations and the consequent processing load from heavily loaded WAPs. The method is essentially one of proactive handovers.

While this method addresses the dynamic differences in processing loads across WAPs, it does so by mandating that MTs associated with one WAP also be within the coverage areas of other WAPs so as to be able to perform handovers and re-associations. If a MT is not within the coverage area of an assisting WAP, it is then expected to physically displace to such a coverage area in order to relieve the first WAP of some processing load. These constraints are rigid and limit the efficacy of the disclosed method. Such limitations are common to all handover-based methods.

"Dynamically configurable beacon intervals for wireless LAN access points", US 2003/0163579 A1, presents a method that requires WAPs to modify, based on prevailing processing load levels, the intervals between the beacon signals that they transmit in order to attract or dissuade MT associations. While the disclosure presents a means for accommodating dynamic differences, it still involves the constraints of requiring a MT to be within the coverage areas of WAPs where processing load is low or being agreeable to displace towards such areas.

"Method and apparatus for selecting an access point in a wireless network", US 6,522,881 B1, describes an invention for MTs to make association decisions based on the level of processing load at WAPs as indicated in the beacon signals that the WAPs transmit. This disclosure focuses on proactive MTs that make association decisions. However the method is also limited by the factors described earlier.

Another shortcoming of these methods and other handover-based methods for dealing with the above problems is that they require frequent handovers between WAPs, which can lead to increased latency and decreased throughput. Another problem is that these methods do not take into account the mobility of the MTs, which can result in poor performance and increased功耗.

g with dynamic differences in WAPs is related to the bulk shifting of communications sessions. In practice MTs maintain a number of communications sessions with the WAPs with which they are associated. As a result, it is very likely that the communications sessions of only one MT or a few MTs constitute a considerable amount of processing load at the WAP. If the WAP were to affect the said MTs to handover and re-associate with another WAP, the processing load at the first WAP would be reduced, however by adversely affecting the other WAP. The other WAP then becomes overloaded and reverses the handover to the first WAP. This may continue without delivering any net gains for the WLAN. This points out that processing load is not finely distributed by methods of handovers. In other words, dynamic differences are not finely managed.

Given these issues, it is necessary to introduce means to deal with the static and dynamic differences in WLAN entities for the purpose of easier large-scale deployment, efficient management and optimal operation.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The disclosed invention relates to wireless local area networks (WLANs) and particularly to means of addressing the issues of static and dynamic differences among WLAN entities. It introduces policies for negotiations between WLAN entities for the purpose of accommodating these differences.

One aspect of the invention deals with negotiations between controlling nodes (CNs) and wireless access points (WAPs) of a WLAN based on policies that allow for accommodating static differences among them. Specifically, it presents means for determining a flexible division in WLAN functionality between the negotiating entities. The invention first involves classifying the functional capabilities of WLAN entities. The entities then determine the capabilities of other entities followed by negotiations between them on how best to divide the functionality among them. Further operations of the WLAN entities are then based on the determined division of functionality. This aspect of the invention enhances interoperability for WLAN entities.

Another aspect of the invention deals with negotiations between WLAN entities based on policies that allow for accommodating the dynamic differences between them. Particularly, it addresses the issue of distributing processing load among WAPs without requiring physical displacement of associated mobile terminals (MTs).

It involves first determining the need to distribute parts of processing load at a WAP. This is followed by the determination of which parts of processing load may be distributed while at the same time maintaining existing association relationships between MT and WAP. Next, an overloaded WAP enters into negotiations with other WAPs in order to determine how the determined parts of processing load may be distributed among them. This aspect of the invention overcomes the limitations of handover-based methods for managing dynamic differences between WLAN entities.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The disclosed invention of policies for negotiations between entities of a wireless local area network (WLAN) is described in two major aspects, the first focusing on negotiations for accommodating static differences among WLAN entities whi

le the second illustrates the aspect dealing with dynamic differences, particularly in levels of processing load.

In the following description, for purpose of explanation, specific numbers, time s, structures, and other parameters are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will be apparent to anyone skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced without these sp ecific details.

Negotiations for Accommodating Static Differences:

A WLAN system embodying a first aspect of the invention dealing with accommodati ng static differences among WLAN entities is exemplified in FIG. 1. The diagram illustrates a WLAN system 100 comprising a controller node (CN) 101, a number of wireless access points (WAPs) 105 and 107, a plurality of mobile terminals (MTs) 113 and a network backbone 117. For the sake of simplicity, WLAN system 100 is shown with a single CN whereas the system embodying the invention may comprise any number of CNs. Also, the diagram indicates a direct connection between CN 10 1 and the WAPs 105 and 107. Alternatively there may be a number of intermediate nodes between them. Similarly, the connection between CN 101 and the network bac kbone 117 may also include a number of intermediate nodes. In all such cases, th e disclosed invention holds scope.

The CN 101 provides support and control to the WAPs 105 and 107 that associate w ith it. A new WAP in the WLAN system must first choose and establish association relationships with one or more CNs before it receives support and control from the CN or CNs. As such, WAPs may simultaneously hold more than one association r elationship with one or more CNs. Similarly, the MTs 113 choose and maintain ass ociations with the WAPs, which in turn provide them with services. These service s include radio transmission and reception, secure transport and mobility. An MT may maintain a number of associations with one or more WAPs, however FIG. 1 sim plifies this with each MT maintaining only one association with one WAP.

It can be inferred about the WLAN system 100 that the WAPs connect to the networ k backbone via the CN. Alternatives to this include the WAPs connecting to the n etwork backbone by other means possibly through other intermediate nodes. In suc h cases, the CN will only be responsible for the control and management of the W APs associated with it, while connectivity to an external network may be handled by other entities.

FIG. 1 shows the CN 101 capable of performing the complete set of WLAN functiona l operations, as specified by some established WLAN standard. It is also capable of other control and management functional operations. Each functional operatio n is logically represented by one of the functional components 115. The operatio ns represented by each of the functional components may include encryption, decr yption, medium access control protocol data unit (MAC PDU) processing, authentic ation, association, quality of service (QoS) processing, Internet Protocol (IP) processing etc.

Each functional component is represented by a functional component code. For the

purpose of illustration some of the functional components in FIG. 1 are represented by functional component codes 'a', 'b' and 'c'. For example functional component 'a' may denote the processing required for a certain type of encryption, for example Wi-Fi Protected Access (WPA) or Advanced Encryption Standard (AES), functional component 'b' for QoS processing, for example priority handling, while functional component 'c' may be that for power control during radio transmission and reception. The functional components are logical units and may be implemented with a single processor using different sets of instructions and context for different functional components. Alternatively, each functional component may be implemented by individual processing entities possibly in disparate entities. While it is envisaged that the actual implementations of the functional components may vary among manufacturers and their implementations, the interfaces linking different components will be common so as to allow seamless processing of a control or data unit from one WLAN entity to another.

Since the WAPs may be from different manufacturers or of different implementations, they may incorporate among them varying degrees of WLAN functional components. These correspond to the different divisions in functionality between CNs and WAPs. For example, WAP 105 is shown to be capable of processing functional components 'a', 'b' and 'c' whereas WAP 107 is only capable of processing functional components 'b' and 'c'. The remaining functional components necessary for their WLAN operations and their control are left to be processed by CN 101. These differences between the WAP and CN entities represent the static differences that are to be accommodated by each other WLAN entity by means of the disclosed method for negotiations.

For the proper operation of the invention, it is necessary for the CNs and WAPs from different manufacturers to follow pre-defined naming conventions for the functional components that they incorporate and recognize. This ensures that negotiating entities can precisely distinguish which functional components a peer entity implements. To this end, the functional component codes need to be consistent in representing various functional components. This convention however need not be followed strictly to the letter. For example, the convention may present standard descriptors for various functional components from which the negotiating entities may discern their properties. As an illustration, "IEEE 802.11i" describes an IEEE WLAN standard pertaining to security functionality. So based on such descriptors, negotiating CNs and WAPs may match parts or all of the names with other descriptors to infer the nature of the functionality components which the descriptors represent.

As mentioned earlier, the interfaces between functional components also need to be consistent across WLAN entities. This is to ensure that the processing of a control or data unit can be performed seamlessly from one WLAN entity to another.

For example, a WAP may perform decoding with an appropriate functional component and then send the decoded data unit to a CN in a form suitable for further processing, say, a form that may be readily decrypted by a decryption functional component at the CN. So although there are different functional components in different WLAN entities, the interfaces between them are mutually recognizable so as to provide seamless processing.

Each WLAN entity is controlled in general by a controller entity. Thus, CN controller 103, WAP controllers 109 and 111 are responsible for the overall operations of CN 101, WAPs 105 and 107, respectively. While the WLAN system 100 shows the controllers to be integral to the WLAN entities, the controllers may also be separate entities. As such, they may remain disparate for each WLAN entity or combined together for a number of WLAN entities. It may be envisaged that specialized controllers exist for each type of entity.

The controllers are particularly responsible for establishing processing schedules for each of the entities that associate with the entities managed by the controllers. Consistent with this, the CN controller maintains processing schedules for WAPs 105 and 107 whereas the WAP controllers in turn maintain processing schedules for their respectively associated MTs 113.

A processing schedule refers to a sequence of functional components that are to be processed for control and data units received from associated devices by the entity that the said controller manages. For example, WAP controller 109 for WAP 105 maintains a processing schedule comprising a sequence of its functional components 'a', 'b' and 'c'. When a control or data unit arrives from an associated MT 113, WAP 105 performs the processing of functional components 'a', 'b' and 'c' based on the established processing schedule. The processing schedule at a WAP may be the same for all associated MTs if all the MTs incorporate consistent functionality. However if MTs implement different degrees of functionality, WAPs may also maintain separate processing schedules for processing the control and data units from different MTs.

In one embodiment of this first aspect of the invention, WAP controllers 109 and 111 for WAPs 105 and 107, respectively, first perform a step 201 in FIG. 2 of discovering CNs. The CNs to be discovered may be within the same administrative domain as the WAPs or the CNs may belong to different administrative domains. This step of discovery may be accomplished based on any node discovery protocol or by the broadcast/multicast/anycast of a specific, mutually recognizable message invoking responses from available CNs.

Next the WAP controllers choose which among the discovered CNs to associate with in a step 203. One possible metric for this choice may be the round-trip latency between the WAPs and CNs. This metric has the advantage of allowing for prompt exchanges of control messages between the WLAN entities. Other metrics that may be used for CN selection include network status, congestion, link status, random selection, cost of using the link, and manufacturer identification. Having chosen a CN 101 with which to associate, WAP controllers 109 and 111 then enter an association phase with the CN. This phase may include mutual authentication, exchange of security information and the establishment of communications protocols for further exchanges.

Then, in a step 205, WAP controllers 109 and 111 enter a negotiation phase with CN controller 103 for the purpose of establishing means to accommodate the possible differences in their respective functional capabilities. In particular, the negotiations are to establish a division of WLAN functionality that is consistent with the capabilities of the negotiating entities and are optimal for the operation of the entities.

ation and management of the whole WLAN.

The negotiations may be initiated by either a WAP controller or a CN controller as in a step 207. WAP controllers initiate by sending information regarding the functional capabilities of the associated WAPs to the chosen CN. This information includes the appropriate codes corresponding to the functional components that the WAPs are capable of processing and their processing schedules. A CN controller initiates negotiations by requesting for functional capabilities information from the associated WAPs.

Upon receiving capabilities information from the associated WAPs and based on established policies, CN controller 103 determines an initial division of WLAN functionality. This division is then enforced between CN 101 and the associated WAPs 105 and 107 as in step 209. The functionality division specifies which of the functional components that can be processed by the WAPs needs to be active and processed by the WAPs themselves and which need to be inactive so that they may be processed by the CN.

In one embodiment, the initial division of functionality is based on a policy that allows each associated WAP to process all the functional components that they are capable of. With such a division, only those functional components that an associated WAP cannot inherently process are left to the CN. Such functional components are then included in the processing schedule of the CN controller. Since WAPs may have dissimilar degrees of functional capabilities, the CN controller may be required to establish separate processing schedules for each associated WAP. As such this embodiment presents a policy which allows for the full capabilities of each WAP to be leveraged on. However this is achieved at the expense of running different processing schedules at the CN controller for different WAPs.

In another embodiment, the initial division of functionality is based on a policy in which the CN controller first determines a subset of functional components that are common across all associated WAPs. The associated WAPs must then process only the determined subset of functional components even if they are capable of processing other functional components. Therefore, the remaining set of functional components required to be processed for each associated WAP will be common to all of them. This common set can then be processed by the CN. This embodiment presents a policy in which the CN controller may maintain a single processing schedule for all associated WAPs. If a new WAP, incorporating functionality components fewer than or incompatible with those specified in the existing processing schedule, associates with the CN, the CN controller repeats the step of determining the subset of functional components that are common across all currently associated WAPs. It is noted that this step need not be performed if a new WAP involves more functionality components than that specified in the single, previously established processing schedule.

Alternatively, the association of a new WAP with a CN may invoke a grace period, in which two processing schedules are maintained simultaneously. The first corresponds to the existing processing schedule which was established before the association of the new WAP, while the second corresponds to the processing schedule which takes into account the functionality of the newly associated WAP. Then da

ta units processed during the grace period are done so based on the processing schedule that is most appropriate. This embodiment provides uninterrupted service s to existing MTs in the event of new WAPs associating with the CN.

In another embodiment, the initial division of functionality is based on a combination of policies, where a subset of associated WAPs is allowed to process all the functional components that they are capable of. Another subset of associated WAPs process only a common subset of functional components that they are capable of processing even if they have greater capabilities. The CN controller determines the subset of functional components that are common across all of the subset of associated WAPs. The remaining set of functional components required to be processed for each associated WAP will be performed by the CN. Therefore the remaining set of functional components will be distinct for each of the associated WAPs of one subset of associated WAPs and be similar for each of the associated WAPs of the other subset of associated WAPs.

Next, having determined an initial division of WLAN functionality, the division is then sent to the associated WAPs for confirmation as in a step 209. The WAP controllers in turn verify that the division is feasible and upon verification return a positive acknowledgement to the CN as in steps 211 and 213.

Given that some WAPs may implement functional components in a non-partitioned manner, for example in a hardwire system, such WAPs may not be able to adhere to the specified initial functionality division. In these cases, the WAPs send a negative acknowledgement to the CN with an updated processing schedule that indicates operational dependencies between their functional components as in a step 215. The CN controller then takes this new processing schedule into account and formulates another functionality division that may be compatible with the WAPs. If the new division is feasible, the WAPs return a positive acknowledgement and if not, the negotiations continue in a similar fashion. As a last resort, upon a fixed number of unsuccessful negotiation exchanges, the CN allows the WAPs to process all their functional components.

During the initial negotiation phase, either CN or associated WAP may choose to forcibly terminate further negotiations based on pre-defined policies and rules even before the negotiation phase is complete. These policies are enforced by either CN or WAP when it is inferred that further negotiations will be moot as in steps 219 and 221. For example, if the difference between the initial divisions of WLAN functionality is significantly dissimilar from the capabilities of a WAP, the WAP may choose to terminate negotiations as it may be futile to proceed further. Alternatively, if either entity determines that the other is illegitimate, the negotiations may be terminated. Many other policies may also be used to enforce termination of negotiations.

Once a functionality division is acceptable to all participating WLAN entities, CN controller 103 establishes appropriate processing schedules for associated WAPs 105 and 107 as in a step 217. These schedules define the sequence of functional components that are to be processed by CN 101 for control and data units received from associated WAPs 105 and 107. Then, CN controller 101 manages each associated WAP in a manner consistent with the processing schedules.

In one embodiment, WLAN functionality may be divided into four functional components that may be denoted by functional component codes 1, 2, 3 and 4. The functional component corresponding to code 1 relates to that parts of WLAN functionality concerning the radio aspects. This may include radio transmission and reception, coding, modulation, power control and beacon signal control. Such a division combining aspects concerning the radio interface will allow for simpler design. The code 2 functional component relates to security aspects, which may include authentication, association, encryption and decryption. The basis for this division is that processing for security involves mathematical computation for which reason they may be consolidated and optimized. Then, the functional component of code 3 deals with the processing required for control and data protocol data units (PDUs). This includes bridging, routing, retransmissions and Internet Protocol (IP) layer processing for which specialized network processors have been developed. Next, the code 4 functional component relates to the general control and management of the WLAN. Quality of Service (QoS) control, configurations and policy management are some of the aspects of this functional component. This embodiment presents a simple and practical classification for WLAN functionality. Negotiations between various WLAN entities may then be based on these classifications. The classifications may also be used to describe different entities. For example, a WAP implementing only radio aspects of WLAN may be referred to as a type 1 entity which will then require a CN capable of the remaining functional components 2, 3 and 4.

In another embodiment of the first aspect, a WAP controller need not explicitly send its functional capabilities information to a CN controller, rather the CN controller infers the capabilities of an associated WAP. Such a means for automated capabilities discovery allows for easier determination of functional capabilities without requiring the explicit exchange of functional component codes between a CN and associated WAPs. In this embodiment, a CN controller sends a special command to an associated WAP to which the WAP responds by generating a data unit and processing it based on its functional components. The emulated data unit is then sent to the CN after being processed by the WAP. The CN controller then infers the functional capabilities of the associated WAP based on the received emulated data unit. Subsequent operations then follow from step 209 in FIG. 2. This embodiment requires associated WAPs to be capable of recognizing and responding to the special command issued by the CN controller.

An alternate form of the embodiment involves a CN controller simulating a data unit as if it was a mobile terminal and sending the simulated data unit to an associated WAP. The destination address of the simulated data unit is set to be the CN itself. Upon receiving the data unit, the WAP performs its processing based on its capabilities and forwards the processed data unit back to the CN. The CN controller then infers the functional capabilities of the associated WAP from the processed data unit. After this, the CN controller devises an initial division of WLAN functionality and sends this to the associated WAP. Subsequent operations then follow from step 209 in FIG. 2.

In another embodiment of the invention, a single entity that integrates both WLAN operational functionality and control and management functionality is presented.

d. FIG. 3 exemplifies this embodiment in that it illustrates such an integrated WLAN entity 301. The integrated WLAN entity is capable of both WAP operations and CN control and management operations for which there are a WAP controller 303 and a CN controller 305, respectively. Each of the WAP and CN functional operations is logically represented by one of the functional components 307 each denoted by a functional component code. These functional components encompass WAP operations like radio transmission and reception, in addition to CN operations like WLAN monitoring and configuration management.

The set of functional components 307 are common to both WAP and CN controllers so that the processing schedule at each controller may include any of the functional components. Each controller operates in an independent manner with the understanding that the complete set of functional components is available for it to schedule. As such, during the negotiations phase between WAP controller and CN controller, the WAP controller sends its capabilities information so as to include the complete set of codes corresponding to all of functional components 307.

Associated with the integrated WLAN entity is a number of MTs 309. WLAN system 300 shows the associated MTs connecting to a network backbone 311 via the integrated WLAN entity. It is also possible for this connection to be made through alternate means like that through other intermediate nodes. To the associated MTs however, there is no difference between an ordinary WAP and the integrated WLAN entity.

Operationally, in this embodiment, the WAP controller of an integrated WLAN entity first performs a discovery of CNs. In essence, the discovery results in finding itself as a CN. Upon discovery, an association phase follows after which the CN controller and WAP controller enter a negotiations phase. Discovery and association are token operations as both the WAP and CN reside within a single entity.

Next, the WAP controller and CN controller begin negotiations in order to determine a suitable division of functionality between them. The WAP controller first sends information regarding its capabilities to the CN controller. This information will include the functional component codes corresponding to all the functional components available within the integrated WLAN entity and a processing schedule that involves all the codes. In response to the capabilities information and based on established policies for functionality divisions, the CN controller devises an initial division of functionality and sends this to the WAP controller. The initial division of functionality will be feasible and acceptable to the WAP controller since its feasibility is based on that of the CN controller which in turn determines the division. As a result, the WAP controller sends a positive acknowledgement to the CN controller. Then both controllers establish processing schedules according to the accepted division in functionality and operate on that basis. This embodiment illustrates how the process of negotiations may take place within an integrated WLAN entity. As such, the disclosed invention will be consistent with various designs for these entities.

In another embodiment of the first aspect of the invention, different CNs may incorporate varying degrees of functionality. As such, a WAP associating with a CN

may require the processing of functionality which is unavailable both with itself and with the CN that it associates. This embodiment serves to address such situations by allowing the various CNs in a WLAN to negotiate among them for the purpose of accommodating differences in their functional capabilities. The CNs may follow the steps put forth in FIG. 2 to determine how the static differences in their functionality may be managed. For example, a first CN may only incorporate 2 types of functional components and it may necessitate in a third component that it is not capable of, but yet it is required for providing services to the WAPs associated with it. In such a case, the first CN discovers and associates with a second CN in the WLAN with which it then negotiates. The negotiations are for the purpose of dividing functionality among the CNs. As a result, the first CN may allow processing of the third functional component to be performed by the second CN.

The embodiments of this first aspect of the invention described insofar illustrate policies with which WLAN entities may negotiate with each other in order to accommodate the varying degrees of static differences that each such entity incorporates. They describe how WAPs incorporating varying degrees of WLAN functionality may be integrally managed by a controlling node. The disclosed method for negotiations provides for flexibility in deploying WLANs with entities from different manufacturers or of different implementations. While prior arts focus on mandating proprietary means of dividing functionality among WLAN entities, this invention serves to accommodate entities of different degrees of functionality. As a result, the division of WLAN functionality between controlling nodes and wireless access points may be achieved in a flexible manner.

Negotiations for Accommodating Dynamic Differences:

This aspect of the invention describes policies with which WLAN entities embodying the disclosed invention may negotiate with each other for the purpose of accommodating dynamic differences among them. It is exemplified by using the varying levels of processing load at different WLAN entities particularly WAPs.

A simplified representation of a WLAN system 400 embodying this aspect of the invention is depicted in FIG. 4. It shows WAPs 401 and 403 that are capable of providing services and performing related processing for a number of associated MTs. The WAPs and MTs may maintain a number of associations with each other, however for reasons of simplicity, the WLAN system of 400 only shows one association with WAP 401 for the single MT 405. This MT 405 is associated with and receives services from WAP 401 over a wireless connection 427. Also the WAPs 401 and 403 are shown to be connected to a network backbone 407, through which they can communicate with other networks and with each other, either directly or via intermediate switching or routing devices. The WAPs may also connect to the network backbone or with each other through a number of intermediate nodes.

During the operation of WLAN system 400, the processing loads at the WAPs may vary due to the dynamic nature of communications. For example, a number of new MTs may choose to associate with a WAP thereby necessitating additional processing at the WAP. Another example is of a MT choosing to be involved in additional numbers of communications sessions again resulting in extra processing for the WAPs.

AP with which it is associated. Consequently, the processing load at various WAPs in the WLAN system will vary over time. It is this dynamism that the invention addresses by requiring WAPs to negotiate with each other for the purpose of distributing processing load from a heavily loaded WAP to a relatively lightly loaded WAP while maintaining existing association relationships with their MTs.

From FIG. 4, WAPs 401 and 403 provide services to associated MTs by performing some type of processing on their behalf. The processing can be logically divided by lines 419 and 421 in WAPs 401 and 403, respectively, as being association-specific (ASP) and non-association-specific (nASP) processing. ASP processing 411 and 413 involves those that are directly dependent on the association between MTs and WAPs. Such processing requires interaction with the wireless interface between a WAP and an associated MT. Examples of ASP processing include transmission and reception of data units, power control, coding and modulation.

nASP processing 415 and 417 refer to processing that are not directly dependent on the wireless aspects of a connection between WAP and associated MT. Examples of nASP processing include bridging, filtering, protocol data unit (PDU) processing and PDU delivery.

WAP controllers 423 and 425 manage and control the overall processing at WAPs 401 and 403, respectively.

The operations involved with this aspect of the invention are described with reference to FIG. 5. The WAP controller in each of the WAPs in a WLAN system embodying the invention performs a step 501 of monitoring the nASP processing load at the WAP. This includes monitoring the nASP processing load for each of the communications sessions for all the associated MTs. Examples of how processing load may be monitored include means for monitoring the processor usage or duration of processor activity for a communications session and then aggregating this for all communications sessions. Another example is a means for monitoring the amount of memory usage for communications sessions. Similarly, a number of other factors may be monitored, either independently or in any combination, to monitor the overall nASP processing load at a WAP. Furthermore, other means of monitoring may also be used.

In one embodiment of the invention, a WAP controller 423 for a WAP 401 derives a resource characteristic for the WAP based on the various factors of nASP processing load that are monitored for each communications session of the associated MTs. The resource characteristic is a representation of the resources or processing load required for providing services to a communications session.

Next, the resource characteristics of all communications sessions for all associated MTs are combined to obtain an aggregate nASP load factor for WAP 401. The aggregate nASP load factor is then compared to a nASP load threshold, in a step 503, to determine impending nASP processing overload conditions that may not be manageable by WAP 401. If the aggregate nASP load factor is determined to be manageable at WAP 401, the monitoring of step 501 is repeated.

If, however, impending nASP processing overload conditions are determined, WAP controller 423 then determines in a step 505, which parts of the nASP processing load at WAP 401 may be distributed to other WAPs of the WLAN system with the aim of reducing overall processing load at WAP 401 while at the same time maintaining existing association relationships with associated MTs, such as that with MT 405. Such a mechanism is unique from traditional methods of distributing processing load which mandate handovers that may necessitate in a MT physically displacing to a coverage area of another WAP. The step 505 is based on the resource characteristics of the communications sessions of MTs associated with WAP 401. For example, a WAP controller may choose to distribute those parts of processing load with the greatest resource characteristics or those with the least resource characteristics. This choice may also be based on other factors such as the expectation of future changes in resource characteristics.

Next, the negotiations phase begins between a first WAP controller and other WAP controllers. This phase involves determining which of the other WAPs are agreeable to accommodate the dynamic differences in processing loads by taking over some parts of the nASP processing load of the overloaded first WAP. In a first stage of negotiations, the WAP controller 423 executes a step 507 of sending solicitation messages to other WAPs of the WLAN system. The solicitation messages include the resource characteristics of those parts of nASP processing load of WAP 401 that have been determined by the WAP controller to be distributed to other WAPs.

WAP controllers receiving the solicitation message determine if they are capable of accommodating the additional processing load as specified in the message. These controllers then respond to the WAP controller initiating the solicitation by either accepting to take over the complete specified load or accepting to handle partial amounts of the load. The initiating WAP controller then uses the responses to determine which of the other WAPs are agreeable and to which extent agreeable, to receiving parts of the nASP processing load that it initially specified. The negotiations may also extend beyond the initial solicitation message if such a need is inferred to exist by the initiating WAP controller. As such, step 507 is used to determine which of the other WAPs in the WLAN system are agreeable to receiving and performing processing of parts of nASP processing load of WAP 401 in order to reduce the processing load at WAP 401.

Next, in a step 509, WAP controller 423, of the overloaded or soon to be overloaded WAP, establishes a tunnel connection 409, between WAP 401 and the WAPs determined in a step 507 to be agreeable to receiving and processing the determined parts of nASP processing load of WAP 401. FIG. 4 illustrates one of the agreeable WAPs to be WAP 403. Relevant context information required for processing of the determined parts of nASP processing load is then transmitted over the established tunnel connection to the agreeable WAPs. Then, in a step 511, WAP controller 423 distributes the determined parts of the ASP processing load of WAP 401 to the agreeable WAPs over the tunnel connection. In doing so WAP controller 423 reduces the overall processing load at WAP 401. All this is achieved while maintaining existing associations with associated MTs and in a fine grained manner so as not to overwhelm the agreeable WAPs.

This embodiment illustrates the efficacy of this aspect of the invention in distributing processing load without the limitations of existing handover-based methods. As such, there are no constraints as to the geographic position or willingness to displace for the associated MTs.

In another embodiment of this aspect of the invention, an overloaded WAP simply relays the processing load required for communications sessions of associated MTs to other agreeable WAPs. This relay may be over wireless, wired or a combination of both types of links. Relevant context information will also need to be relayed so as to facilitate the processing of the relayed processing load.

In one embodiment, the tunnel connection between two WAPs is established over a direct link between WAPs. This direct link may be wireless and similar to the link between WAPs and MTs in which case the WAPs determine a radio channel alternate from the channel used for communications with associated MTs and use this to exchange relevant context information and determined parts of nASP processing load. Alternatively, the link between two WAPs can be wired and directly connected. With this embodiment, the tunnel connection need not traverse the network backbone but rather can be established directly.

In another embodiment of the invention, nASP processing load is defined as the processing required for security algorithms used for the encryption and decryption of MAC PDUs that are transmitted to and received from associated MTs. Processing of security algorithms is a type of non-association-specific processing which is computationally intensive due to the complex characteristic. As such, a significant increase in the number of associated MTs or in the volume of traffic to and from associated MTs will in turn lead to a corresponding increase in the processing of the security algorithms. In this embodiment, WAPs and associated MTs encrypt their respective transmissions over the wireless connection based on an established security algorithm. Upon receipt of transmissions, the WAPs and MTs perform decryption processing based on the same established security algorithm.

When the nASP processing load for encryption and decryption becomes significant, as measured by its resource characteristic exceeding a nASP load threshold, a WAP controller 423 of WAP 401 sends a solicitation message to determine which of other WAPs in the WLAN system are agreeable to receiving and processing parts of nASP processing load corresponding to the security algorithms used for transmissions between WAP 401 and MT 405. If WAP 403 is agreeable to processing the nASP processing load, its WAP controller 425 responds to the solicitation message. Upon receipt of the response to the solicitation message, WAP controller 423 establishes a tunnel connection to WAP 403 and then sends relevant security keys and context information to WAP 403 via the established tunnel connection.

Next, upon establishment of the tunnel connection and exchange of the security keys and context information, WAP controller 423 sends to WAP 403 encrypted MAC PDUs received from associated MT 405. WAP controller 423 also sends to WAP 403, MAC PDUs that are to be encrypted before transmission to the associated MT 405. WAP 403 then processes the nASP processing load for encryption of MAC PDUs and sends the encrypted MAC PDUs to WAP 401 via the tunnel connection. Having received the encrypted MAC PDUs, WAP 401 then transmits them to the associated MTs. In t

his embodiment, the computationally intensive processing of security algorithms is distributed across WAPs so as to lower the processing load at a WAP. This is performed without affecting re-associations of MTs and as such this method is not limited by the shortcomings of handover-based methods.

In another embodiment, a WAP controller distributes the nASP processing load corresponding to those security algorithms that cannot be processed by the WAP due to reasons of unfamiliarity of the said security algorithms while at the same time maintaining association relationships with associated MTs. Given the growing numbers of MTs and other devices in which WLAN capabilities are incorporated, there may be many security features implemented in such MTs and devices, all of which not being recognizable by all WAPs with which associations are sought. As such this embodiment allows a WAP to maintain associations with MTs and other devices even if some of the required processing is not possible at the said WAP. This embodiment is described using an uncommon security algorithm as example; however it is valid for any other type of processing that is uncommon between WAP and MT.

During an association of a MT with a WAP, a security algorithm that is knowledgeable to both entities is negotiated upon for securing transmissions over the wireless connection between the two entities. Traditionally, if the WAP is not knowledgeable of any of the security algorithms used by the MT, the MT cannot be associated with the said WAP. The here forth described embodiment of the invention transcends this limitation and permits MTs to associate with a WAP even if the WAP is not knowledgeable of any of the security algorithms used by the MTs.

In this embodiment, a WAP controller 423 permits a MT 405 to associate with WAP 401 even though there are no common security algorithms that both WAP 401 and MT 405 are knowledgeable of. During the association phase, WAP controller 423 sends a solicitation message to other WAPs in the WLAN system to determine which WAPs are knowledgeable of and agreeable to processing any of the security algorithms familiar to MT 405. If WAP 403 is knowledgeable of and agreeable to processing any of the security algorithms familiar to MT 405, WAP controller 425 responds to the solicitation message from WAP controller 423 with a chosen security algorithm. Upon receipt of the response to solicitation message, WAP controller 423 then establishes a tunnel connection 409 with WAP 403. WAP controller 423 next sends relevant security keys and context information to WAP 403 via the established tunnel connection. The chosen security algorithm is then intimated to MT 405 and it is associated with WAP 401.

Upon establishment of tunnel connection and exchange of security keys and context information, WAP controller 423 sends to WAP 403, MAC PDUs received from MT 405 associated with WAP 401, that have been encrypted based on the chosen security algorithm. WAP 403 receives the encrypted MAC PDUs via the tunnel connection and decrypts them based on chosen security algorithm and established security keys and context information. WAP controller 423 also sends to WAP 403, MAC PDUs that are to be encrypted before transmission to the associated MT 405. In this case, WAP 403 receives MAC PDUs via the tunnel connection, encrypts them based on chosen security algorithm and sends the encrypted MAC PDUs back to WAP 401. WAP 401 then transmits the encrypted MAC PDUs to the associated MT 405. In this embodiment,

ment, the lack of knowledge about a security algorithm does not limit a WAP from allowing a MT to associate with it. As such it provides greater flexibility in providing services to a great number of MTs with different processing requirements.

Another embodiment of the invention relates to the size of PDUs processed by WAPs. Studies in processor scheduling have shown that processing large PDUs before small PDUs leads to greater average processing time as compared to cases where small PDUs are processed before large PDUs. FIG. 6 illustrates this through example. In a first case, it shows two processing schedules 601 and 603 for processor 613 and 615, respectively. The scheduling order 605 and 607 denote the relative order in which PDUs A, B, C and D are processed. 609 and 611 denote the processing time, in arbitrary time units (tu), required for processing each of the PDUs.

In schedule 601, large PDUs A and B are processed before small PDUs C and D. The average processing time for the PDUs is 21.25 tu, while it is only 16.25 tu for the PDUs in schedule 603 where small PDUs C and D are processed before large PDUs A and B. Clearly schedule 603, in which small PDUs are processed before large PDUs, leads to significant reductions in average processing time.

In a second case, the aspect of processing overhead for processor scheduling is considered. The processing of each PDU requires some processing overhead which includes memory access time and context transfer time. The overhead is generally independent of the size of the PDU as it is required before the actual processing. FIG. 6 depicts a schedule 617 for small PDUs alone in which processing overhead time 621 and 625, respectively. Processing overhead time 623 and processing time 627 is for large PDUs in schedule 619. From this, it is seen that the processing overhead takes up 50% of total time in schedule 617 whereas overhead constitutes only 331/3% in schedule 619. This illustrates how processing only small PDUs can lead to a processor handling more overhead than when a processor handles large PDUs.

In an embodiment of the invention related to the size of PDUs, the nASP processing load is defined as the size of PDUs handled by a WAP. A WAP controller 423 of WAP 401 monitors the size of PDUs received over a wireless connection 427 from an associated MT 405. When WAP controller 423 determines that WAP 401 is processing any of the previous described cases, the controller determines a processing schedule for a subset of the monitored received PDUs. The aim of the processing schedule is to optimize average processing time and processing overhead time at WAP 401.

Next, WAP controller 423 derives a resource characteristic for the PDUs that may be distributed to other agreeable WAPs for processing. As such, the resource characteristic represents the processing load required for processing PDUs other than those that are processed by the WAP 401 itself. The resource characteristic is then sent to other WAPs of the WLAN system as part of a solicitation message to determine WAPs agreeable to processing the PDUs described in the message.

If WAP 403 is agreeable to the nASP processing of PDUs described in the solicitation message, the WAP 403 sends a response message to the WAP 401. The response message includes the processing overhead time for the PDUs described in the solicitation message. The WAP 401 then updates its processing schedule to account for the processing overhead time of the WAP 403.

tion message, WAP controller 425 responds accordingly. A WAP in the WLAN system will be agreeable to processing PDUs from another WAP when processing such PDUs would allow it to optimize its own average processing time and processing overhead time. Upon receipt of the response, WAP controller 423 then establishes a tunnel connection 409 with WAP 403 and sends relevant context information to WAP 403 via the established tunnel connection.

Having established the tunnel connection and exchanged relevant context information, WAP controller 423 sends to WAP 403, PDUs described by the previously sent resource characteristic with the aim of optimizing average processing time and processing overhead time at WAP 401. So with this embodiment, the nASP processing of PDUs of different sizes may be distributed in a manner so as to optimize processing while at the same time maintaining association relationships between WAPs and MTs.

Another embodiment of the disclosed method concerns the distribution of processing of ISO-OSI layer 3 and layers above layer 3 from a first WAP to other WAPs while maintaining association relations between the first WAP and MTs associated with it. Many WAPs are currently capable of processing up to ISO-OSI layer 2, however there are vendors manufacturing WAPs capable of ISO-OSI layer 3 processing.

This embodiment refers to such devices and other similar WAPs. Processing for ISO-OSI layer 3 and layers above layer 3 includes quality of service (QoS) provisioning, routing and scheduling. In this embodiment, nASP processing load is defined as the processing concerning ISO-OSI layer 3 and layers above layer 3.

In this embodiment, a WAP controller 423 for WAP 401 derives a resource characteristic for the processing of ISO-OSI layer 3 and layers above 3 based on the factors of nASP processing load monitored for each of the communications sessions between WAP 401 and associated MT 405. The resource characteristics of all communications sessions are then combined to derive an aggregate nASP load factor for WAP 401 which is then compared to a nASP load threshold to determine impending nASP processing overload conditions.

If impending nASP processing overload conditions are determined, WAP controller 423 then determines parts of nASP processing load of ISO-OSI layer 3 and layers above 3 that may be distributed to other WAPs in the WLAN system with the aim of reducing overall processing load at WAP 401. Next, WAP controller 423 sends a solicitation message, comprising resource characteristics of the determined parts of nASP processing load of ISO-OSI layer 3 and layers above 3, to determine which other WAPs are agreeable to receiving and performing processing of the parts of nASP processing load on behalf of WAP 401.

If WAP 403 is agreeable to processing the parts of nASP processing load based on the solicitation message, WAP controller 425 sends a positive response to WAP 401. Upon receiving the response, WAP controller 423 establishes a tunnel connection 409 between WAP 401 and WAP 403 after which relevant context information required for processing of parts of nASP processing load of ISO-OSI layer 3 and layers above 3 is transmitted over tunnel connection to WAP 403. Then WAP controller 423 sends the determined parts of nASP processing load to WAP 403 with the aim of reducing nASP processing load at WAP 401 by distributing parts of processing

load to other WAPs while maintaining existing association relations between WAPs and MTs.

In yet another embodiment of the aspect of the invention dealing with negotiations for accommodating dynamic differences among WLAN entities, a central controller entity takes part in the negotiations. Broadly, the central controller entity coordinates how the dynamic differences are to be managed among participating WLAN entities. One particular embodiment involves the central controller coordinating the distribution of nASP processing load across the WAPs under its purview.

This is described with reference to FIG. 7 which illustrates a central controller 729 that is capable of monitoring the nASP processing loads at WAPs 701 and 703. When the nASP processing load at WAP 701 exceeds a nASP processing load threshold, the central controller sends a solicitation message to other WAPs in the WLAN system requesting assistance for the processing of parts of processing load of WAP 701. This begins the negotiations phase between the central controller and other WAPs in the WLAN system. The solicitation message includes descriptors of the parts of processing load at WAP 701 to be distributed to other WAPs with the aim of reducing overall processing load at WAP 701.

If WAP 703 is agreeable to assist with the processing for WAP 701, a WAP controller 725 responds to the solicitation message. The central controller then intimates WAP 701 about the acceptance, after which WAP 701 establishes a tunnel connection 709 with WAP 703. It then sends WAP 703 relevant context information followed by the parts of processing load as specified in the solicitation message. Alternatively, WAP 701 may send the context information and parts of processing load to the central controller which then forwards this to the agreeable WAPs like WAP 703. So with this embodiment, processing load is distributed across WAPs of a WLAN with a central controller coordinating the distribution.

In another embodiment, the central controller receives regular information from WAP controllers of the WAPs under its purview regarding their nASP processing loads. As such, the WAP controllers themselves determine overload conditions and the need to distribute parts or all of nASP processing load to other WAPs or other WLAN entities. The negotiations phase in this embodiment is thus initiated by the WAP controllers and then further pursued between the central controller and other WAPs.

The embodiments presented so far exhibit how negotiations between various WLAN entities based on the disclosed policies may be used to accommodate the dynamic differences among them. In particular, they describe how processing load may be classified as being association-specific and non-association-specific. They also illustrate how parts of nASP processing load may be distributed to other WAPs of the WLAN system for the purpose of reducing overall processing load at a first WAP. The disclosed invention is unique in that it permits the distribution of processing load while maintaining existing association relationships between WAPs and MTs. As such, the disclosed method for accommodating dynamic differences does not necessitate in the physical displacement of any WLAN entity which is unlike existing methods. This innovation is therefore more flexible than handover-based methods for distributing processing load. It also transcends the limitations

of such schemes.

The various aspects of the disclosure presented insofar illustrate the novelty of the method for negotiations in accommodating static and dynamic differences among WLAN entities. Whereas, extant methods focus on hard divisions in functionality among WLAN entities, this invention presents alternate means where functionality divisions may be made in flexible manners. Also, while existing methods require re-associations and the consequent geographical and physical limitations of handovers, this innovation puts forth ways of dealing with imbalances in processing load without the constraints of handover-based methods.

It will be clear to anyone skilled in the related art that the disclosed invention may take the form of numerous other embodiments with numerous other policies for the negotiation and handling of differences among WLAN entities without deviating from the essence and scope of this disclosure. As such this invention will be applicable in all such embodiments and practices.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates an operational representation of a wireless local area network (WLAN) system used to illustrate a first aspect of the disclosed invention dealing with policies for negotiations between WLAN entities, particularly between a controlling node (CN) and wireless access points (WAPs);

FIG. 2 depicts the general operational steps involved in a first aspect of the invention dealing with policies for negotiations between a CN and WAP.

FIG. 3 shows an integrated WLAN entity exemplifying one embodiment of a first aspect of the invention in which the capabilities of a CN and WAP are integrated into one entity;

FIG. 4 illustrates a simplified framework for a second aspect of the invention dealing with policies for negotiations for the purpose of accommodating dynamic differences among WLAN entities, particularly between WAPs;

FIG. 5 depicts the general operational steps involved in a second aspect of the invention dealing with policies for negotiations for accommodating dynamic differences among WLAN entities. Specifically, it deals with processing loads at various entities;

FIG. 6 serves to explain the reasoning for one embodiment of a second aspect of the invention, wherein the definition of processing load is taken to be the size of the protocol data unit (PDU) that is received by the WAP from associated MTs;

FIG. 7 illustrates one embodiment of a second aspect of the invention in which a central controller performs a supervisory role in the negotiations for accommodating dynamic differences among WLAN entities.

Description of the Symbols

100, 300, 400, 700 Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN) system

101 controller node (CN)

103, 305 CN controller

105, 107, 401, 403, 701, 703 wireless access point (WAP)

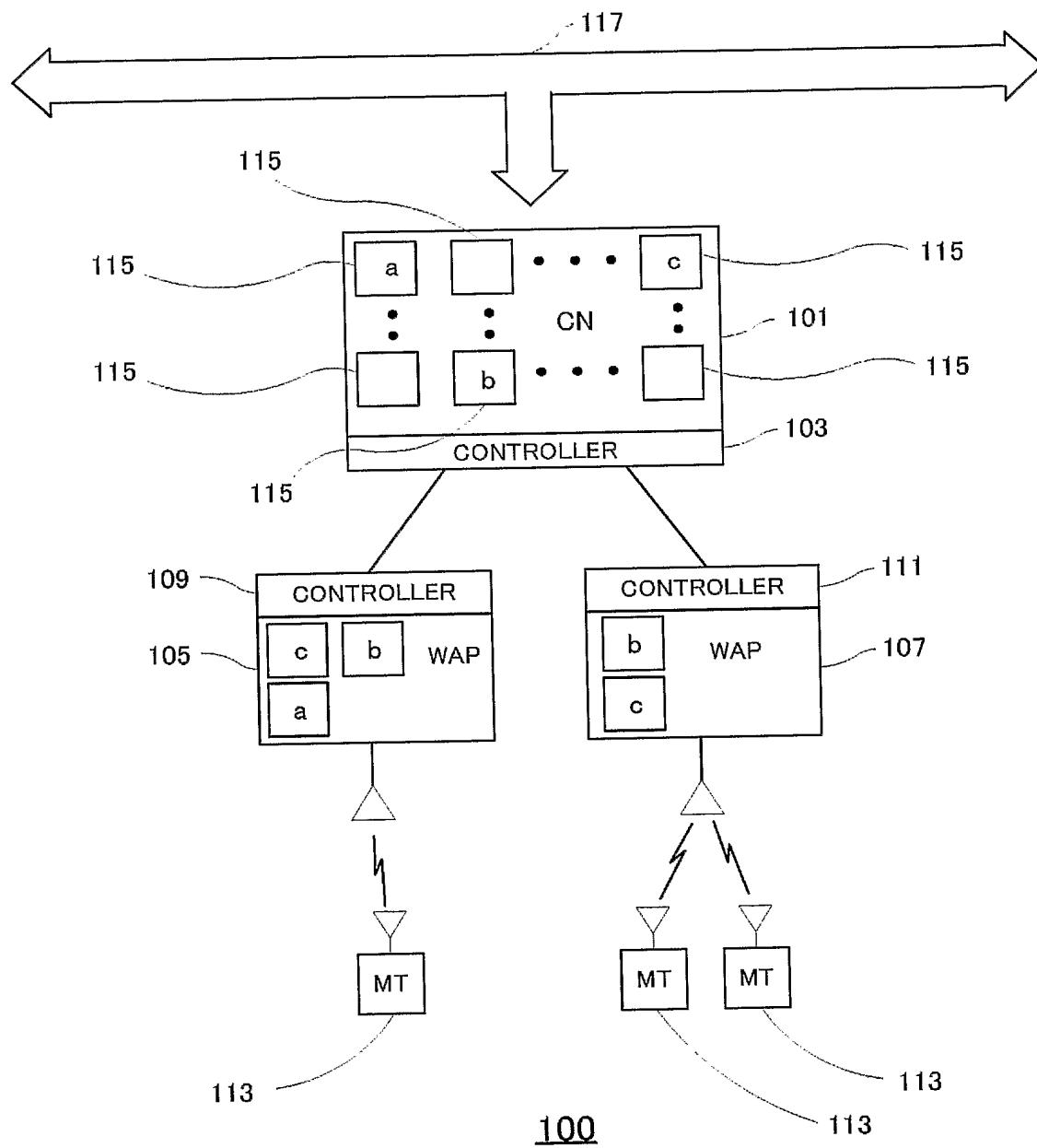
109, 111, 303, 423, 425, 723, 725 WAP controller

113, 309, 405, 705 mobile terminal (MT)

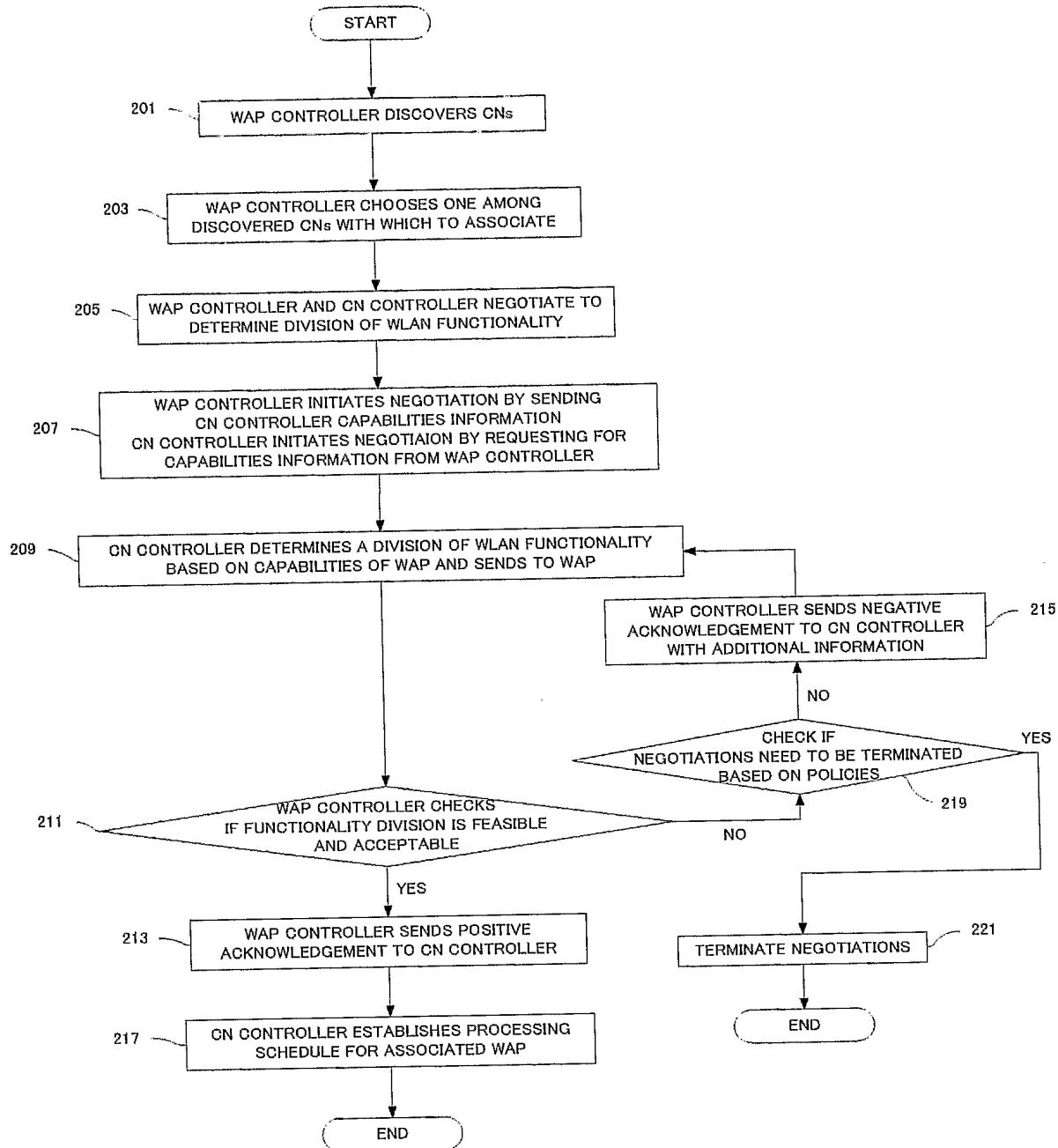
115, 307 functional component

117, 311, 407, 707 network backbone
301 WLAN entity
409, 709 tunnel connection
411, 413, 711, 713 ASP
415, 417, 715, 717 nASP
427, 727 wireless connection
613, 615, 629, 631 processor
605, 607 scheduling order
729 central controller

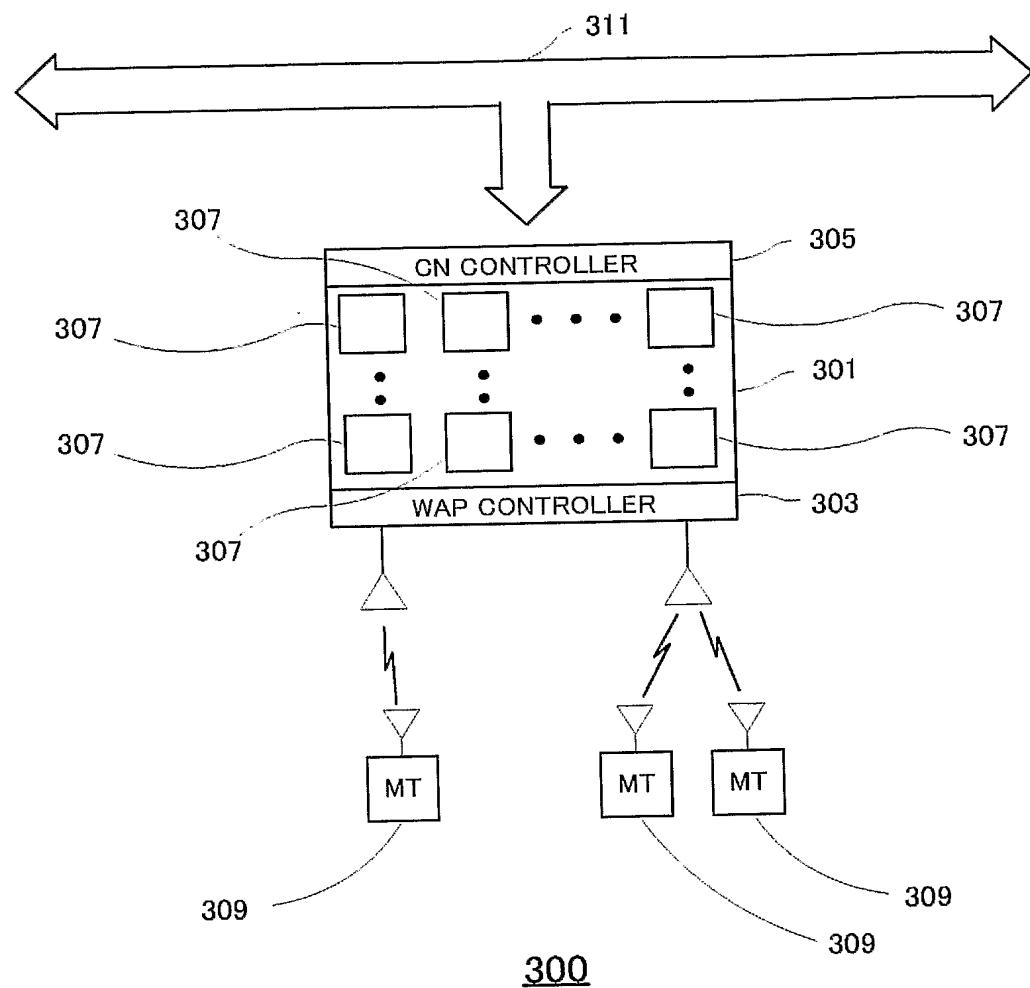
【書類名】 外国語図面
【図1】



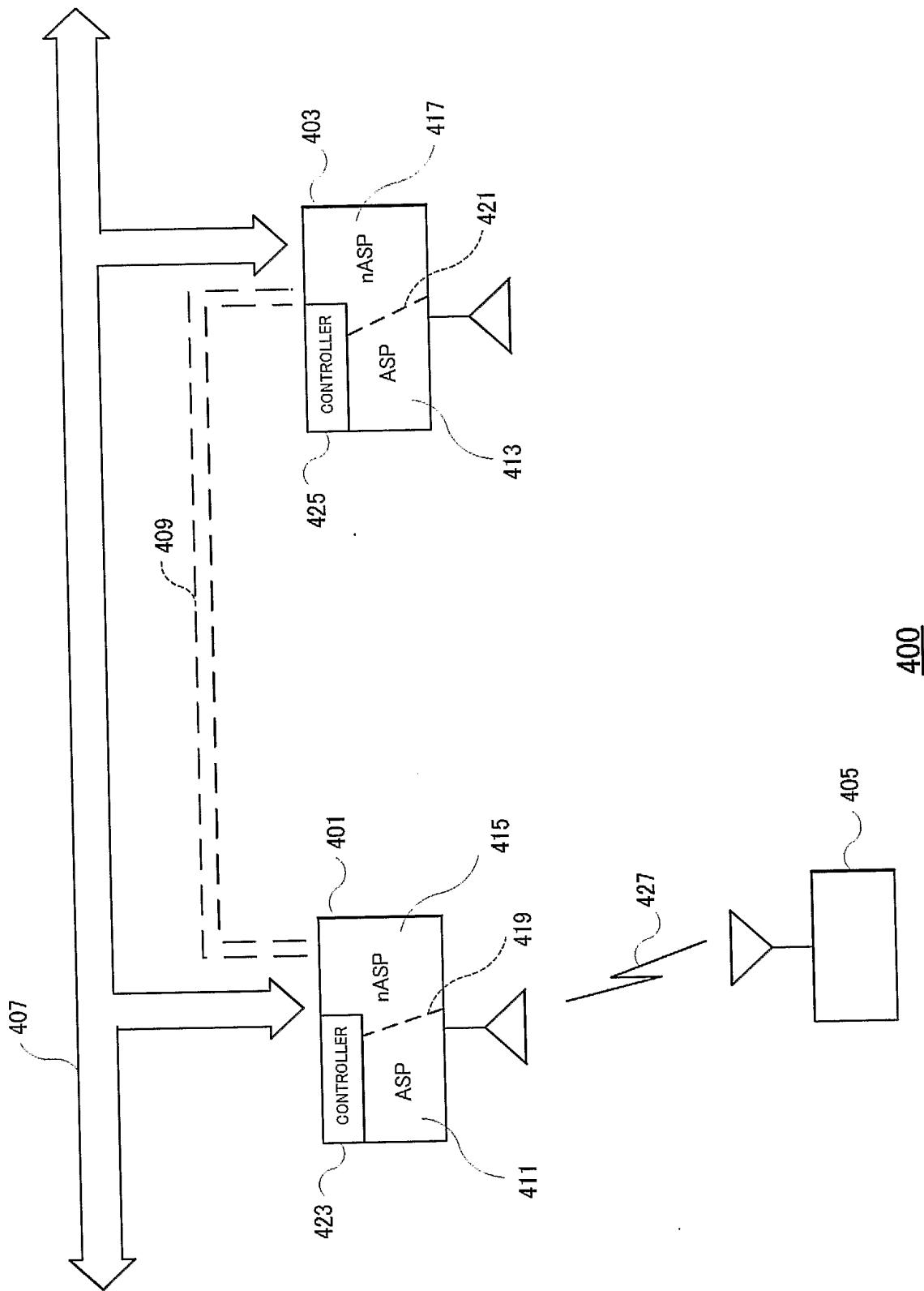
【図2】



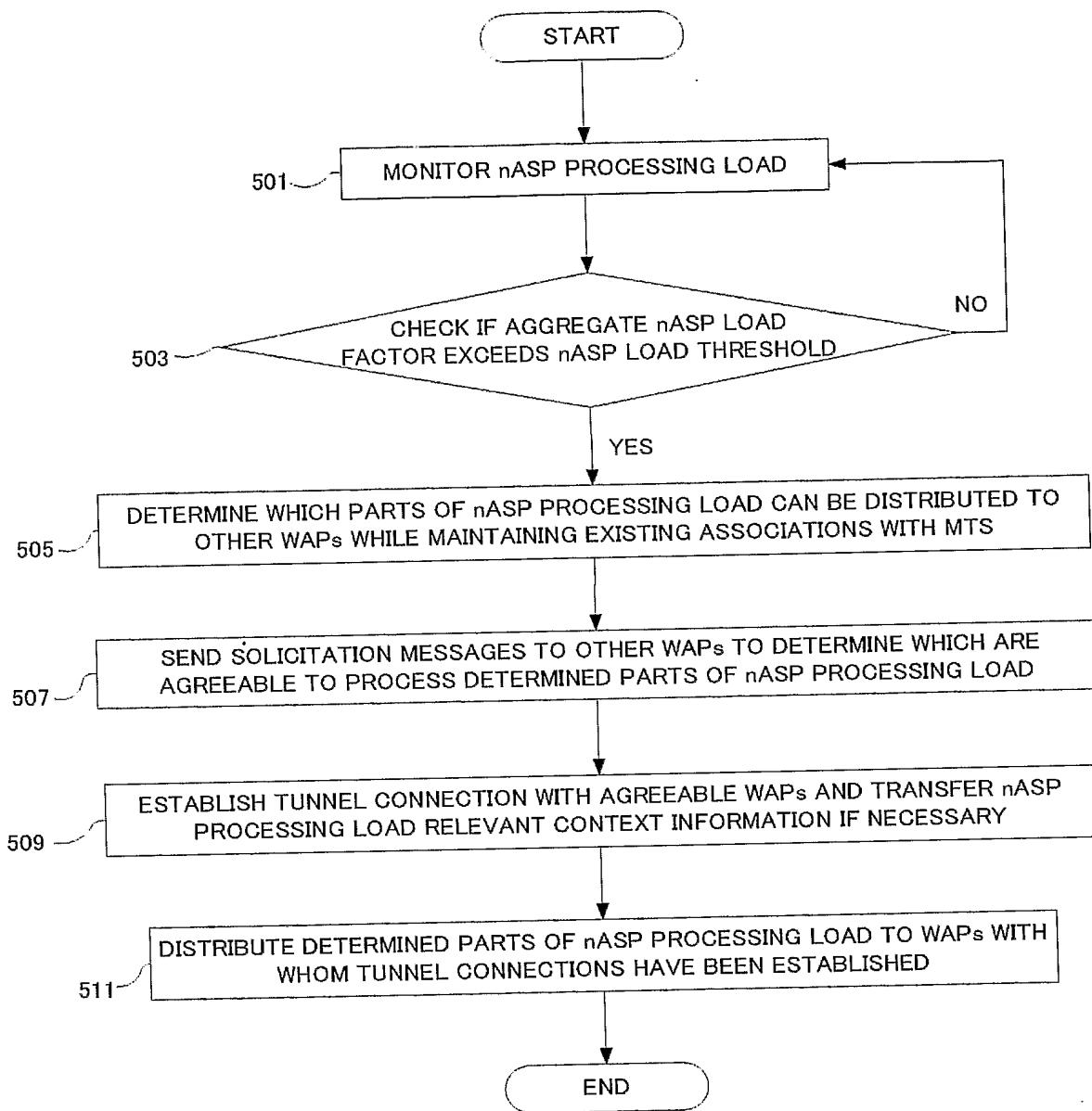
【図3】



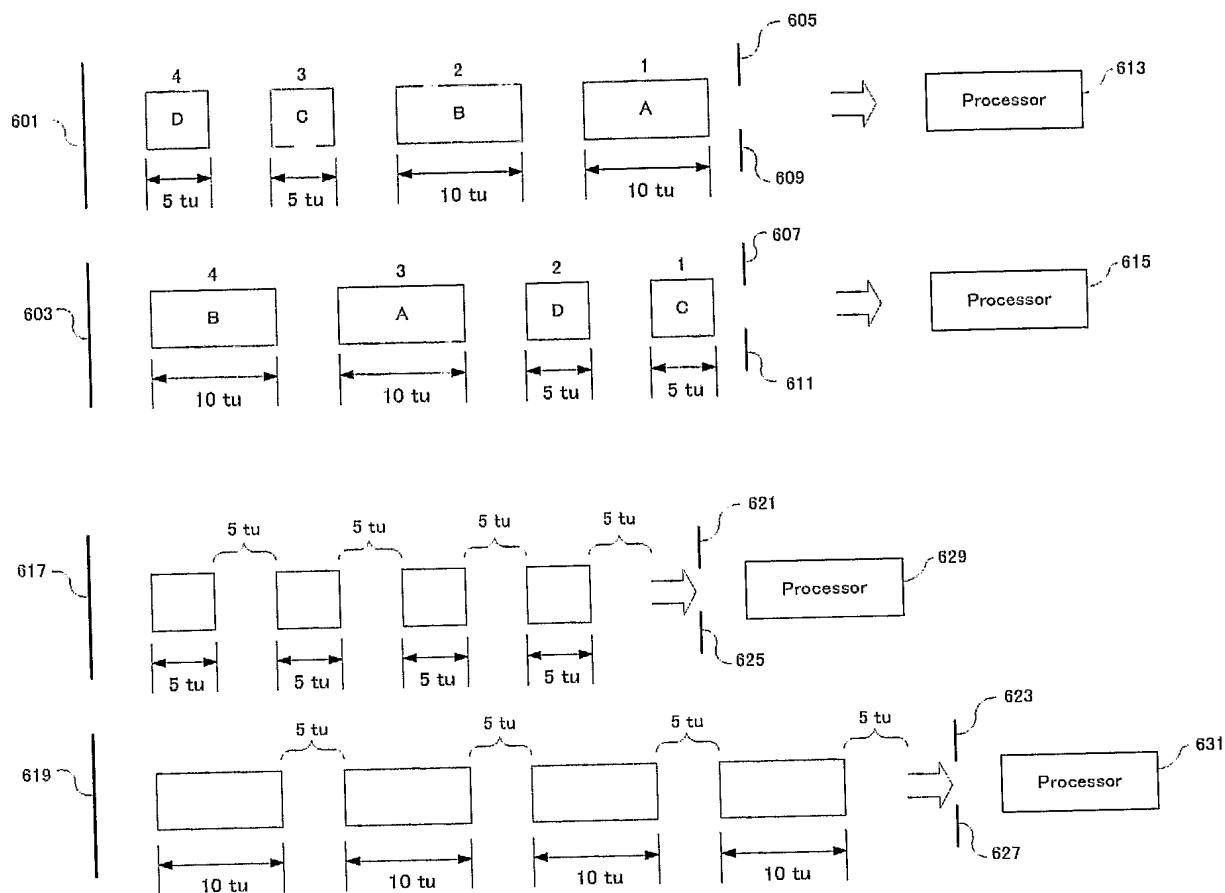
【図 4】



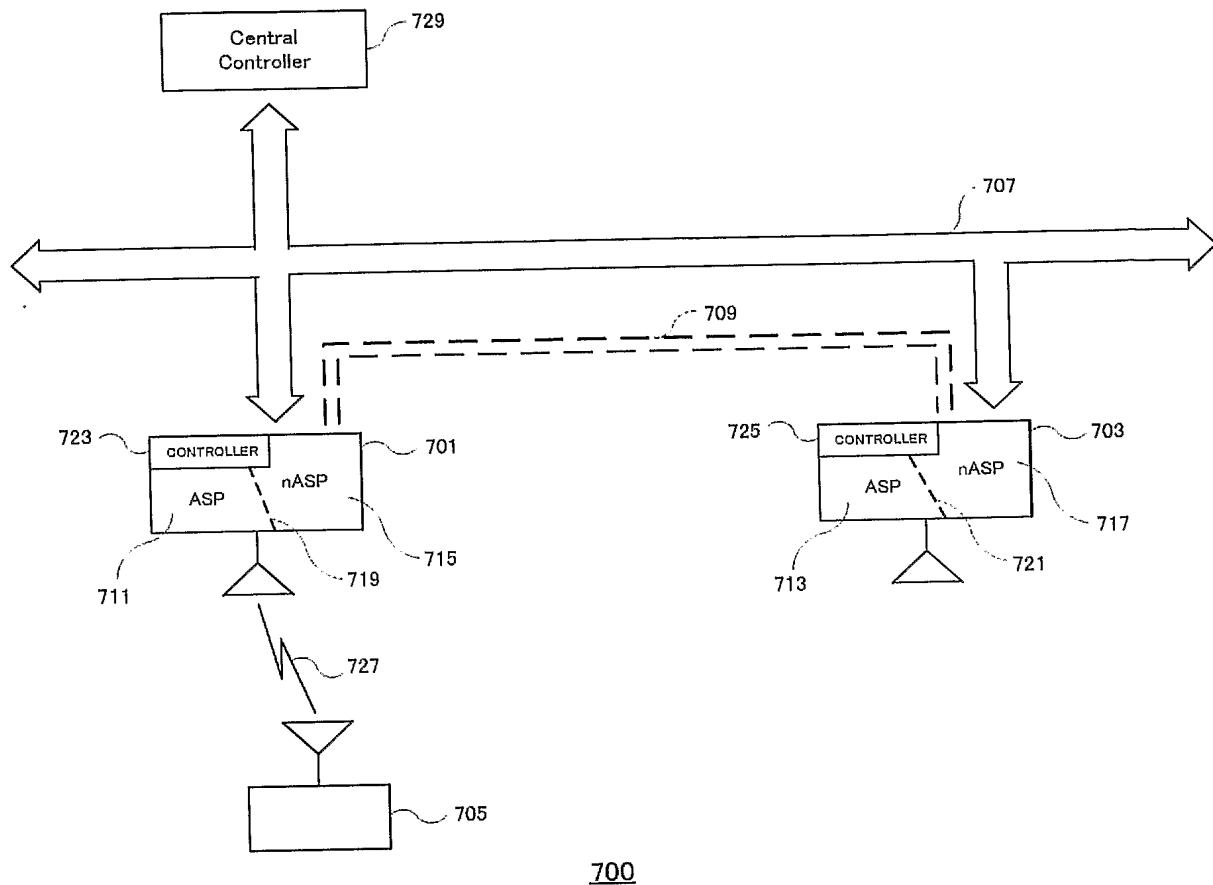
【図 5】



【図 6】



【図 7】



【書類名】 外国語要約書

1 Abstract

A method for negotiations between various entities of a wireless local area network (WLAN) including negotiations between controlling nodes (CNs) and wireless access points (WAPs) and negotiations between WAPs is disclosed. These negotiations are used for the purpose of establishing the capabilities of the various entities, determining how such capabilities may be optimally divided among the negotiating entities and then dividing the capabilities among the entities based on this determination. The capabilities include those required for the operation, control and management of the WLAN entities and the encompassing WLAN. The disclosed method introduces means for flexibly accommodating the varying degrees of differences in capabilities among the WLAN entities between the WLAN entities.

2 Representative Drawing Figure 1

認定・付加情報

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